REMARKS

Claims 1 and 3-25 are pending in the application, with Claims 1 and 14 being independent. Claims 1, 13, 14, and 23-25 have been amended. Support for the amendments is found in the original disclosure.

Applicants respectfully request the Examiner to reconsider and withdraw the outstanding rejections in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

The August 11, 2006 Advisory Action states that the "newly amended claims fail to overcome prior art found by the Examiner upon further searching". In a subsequent telephone conversation between Applicants' representative and the Examiner, the Examiner identified this art as JP 2001-089009 (Seki). Accordingly, Applicants understand Claims 1 and 3-25 to be rejected either under 35 U.S.C. § 102 or § 103 over JP 2001-089009. This rejection is respectfully traversed for the following reasons.

Amended independent Claim 1 recites, in part, that supplied sheets are held in a sheet holding portion with their upstream edges aligned by moving the supplied sheets in a direction opposite to the conveying direction (in which sheet conveying means conveys the sheets from the sheet holding portion to a sheet stacking means) to abut against an abutment stopper until the last sheet of the sheets to be stored is supplied in the sheet holding portion. In addition, amended Claim 1 recites that the stored sheets are conveyed to the sheet stacking means from the sheet holding portion by the sheet conveying means when a downstream edge in the conveying direction of the last sheet of the sheets to be stored has projected from the downstream edges of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a predetermined amount.

By this arrangement, a buffer mechanism can be provided in which a sheet holding portion (corresponding but not limited to buffer unit 140) can store the supplied sheets while processing is applied to the sheets stacked on a sheet stacking means (corresponding but not limited to processing tray 129), thereby obtaining enough time for processing the preceding sheets.

In addition, by this arrangement, the supplied sheets held in the sheet holding portion can be moved in a direction opposite to the conveying direction in which the sheets are conveyed from the sheet holding portion to the sheet stacking means until the last sheet of the sheets to be stored is supplied in the sheet holding portion in order to align the upstream edges of the supplied sheet with an abutment stopper (corresponding but not limited to trailing edge holding-down member 135). Further, by this arrangement, the sheets stored in the sheet holding portion can be conveyed to the sheet stacking means when a downstream edge of the last sheet has projected from the downstream edges of the other sheets held in the sheet holding portion without aligning (as discussed, for example, at page 63, line 3 to page 65, line 17 of the specification).

Moreover, by this arrangement:

- upstream edges of the sheets other than the last sheet are aligned when discharged to the stacking means, thereby improving an accuracy of alignment after the sheets are stacked on the stacking means; and
- the upstream edge of the last sheet can skip alignment at the sheet holding portion so that it is possible to reduce the conveying time of the sheets and improve processing efficiency of the sheets.

In contrast, the patent to Seki is understood to relate to a post-processing apparatus comprising a storing tray 30 having a first tray 36 for storing sheets, and a second tray 50,

provided above the first tray 36, which is capable of sliding to move between a home position and an escape position. In Seki, the second tray 50 is understood to move from the escape position to the home position after the last sheet of a first booklet is stored in the first tray 36, and to store the second booklet temporally while a sheet bundle of the first booklet is discharged from the first tray 36. This patent is also understood to disclose that then, an aligning plate 58 stores the sheet bundle of the first booklet in a direction orthogonal to the sheet discharge direction, while the sheet bundle of the first booklet is discharged from the first tray 36, and performs an alignment operation for every one sheet being stored in the second tray 50.

The Seki patent, however, is not understood to disclose or suggest that when sheets of the second booklet, which is temporally stored, falls into the second tray 50, the downstream edge of the last sheet, which is stored before the sheet falls, has projected from the downstream edges of the other stored sheets. Therefore, this patent is not understood to disclose or suggest that stored sheets are conveyed to a sheet stacking means from a sheet holding portion by a sheet conveying means when a downstream edge in the conveying direction of the last sheet of the sheets to be stored has projected from the downstream edges of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a predetermined amount, as recited by amended Claim 1. Since the Seki patent is understood to fail to disclose or suggest at least one feature of amended Claim 1, amended Claim 1 is understood to be neither anticipated, nor rendered obvious by this patent.

In addition, the Seki patent is not understood to disclose or suggest that stored sheets are conveyed to a processing tray from a sheet holding portion by a sheet discharging rotary member when a downstream edge in the conveying direction of the last sheet of the sheets to be stored has projected the downstream edges of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a

predetermined amount, as recited by amended Claim 14. Since the Seki patent is understood to fail to disclose or suggest at least one feature of amended Claim 14, amended Claim 14 is understood to be neither anticipated, nor rendered obvious by this patent.

The dependent claims are allowable for the reasons given for the independent claims and because they recite features that are patentable in their own right. Individual consideration of the dependent claims is respectfully solicited.

Turning to the Kubo et al. patent, applied in the previous Office Action, Applicants note that its publication date, March 19, 2003, is after the March 7, 2003 priority date for the present application. Therefore, this patent is not a reference against the claims of the present application. To overcome the rejection involving this patent, Applicants are filing the attached sworn translation of the priority document. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the previous rejection of the claims over this patent be withdrawn.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, the application is now in allowable form . Therefore, early passage to issue is respectfully solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address given below.

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